

DESIGNING ACADEMIC LITERACY FRAMEWORK OF EAP PROGRAM FOR INDONESIAN LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to design English academic literacy framework for EAP program in Indonesia. EAP program in Indonesian context has been set modifying ESP class and assign students of non-English program in a university to learn English as additional course. This study uses qualitative approach and collects data from variety of sources: document, textbook, students, lecturers, and staffs. The study discovers that English academic literacy does not appear in the teaching program of EAP as set in the textbook and learning outcomes. Teaching materials focus on English skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing as well as vocabulary and grammar. However, quality of materials is low and the management program is not standard yet. This study recommends that English academic literacy should include General Word List 1,000 to 3,000, academic vocabulary, basic grammar, and competency on reading, writing, and speaking. Due to limitation of speaking exposure, oral English academic literacy should receive priority in learning activities and classroom instruction.

Key words: academic literacy, higher education, EAP

1. INTRODUCTION

The term academic literacy has entered the educational discourse but models for developing students' academic literacy has not yet been explored in Indonesian context. By virtue, university students in Indonesia are expected to discuss, read and write high quality of academic content materials students should accomplish for minimum competency but settings to equip students' academic environments are lack of exposures. Academic literacy is a composite of the generic, transferrable skills that are required of and developed by academic study and research. Academic literacy comprises of: (1) Knowledge of how academic discourse is structured and presented, (2) Knowledge of how academic discourse is produced, (3) Communication, (4) Creative and critical thinking, (5), Independent learning, and (6) Respect for the work and effort of others [1].

Academic literacy appears on theories of reading, writing and literacy as social practices, aspiring that reading and writing only make sense when studied in the context of social and cultural parts [2]. This approach asserts that reading and writing in higher education can fall into three models: study skills, academic socialisation and academic literacy [3].

The study skills approach takes the form of surface level language workshop or course, covering aspects of language, spelling and grammar and it takes is also a model typical writing tasks from essays to reports and note-taking applicable for university students. Academic socialisation approach suggests contexts that students are acculturated into the academic way of life, culture and habits. This approach admits that language and discourse practices are homogeneous; one approach will suit all disciplines, from arts to science to humanities [3]. The third model of academic literacy is based on the New Literacy Studies, promoting a perspective that reading, writing and meaning are situated within specific discourses [4]. This way, discourse is defined as being a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group [5].

In Indonesian context where English language is taught as a foreign language double barriers exist as main problems. *First*, in the perspective of academic literacy, academic behaviour, habits, and disciplines comes as the main focus that faculty should formulate from which students should perform. *Second*, contents of academic literacy cover competencies the students would achieve to help their study success and English is the core materials that faculty should focus and students would achieve standardized competency of English for Academic Purposes (EAP).

Regarding the EAP program, this study devotes its focus to design framework on English competency the students should accomplish in the EAP program. From the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) meetings prior to survey, a list of weaknesses is identified: (1) lack of ability in listening, speaking, critical reading, and writing, (2) lack of basic knowledge of English: vocabulary and grammar, (3) lack of exposures to speak English, and (4) lack of challenges to use English in various circumstances. Focus of this study refers to the standardized English academic literacy that students should accomplish nine language competencies adapted from The University of Pretoria as follows:

1. Is student academic vocabulary good enough?
2. Can students see how metaphors, for example, are used to describe issues?
3. Can students see how a text is compiled and linked together?
4. How comfortable are students with different types of language or text? (Scientific language makes use of a wide range of descriptions, diagrams, instructions, tables, arguments, etc.)
5. Can students interpret graphic information and understand a diagram?
6. Can students distinguish between the main idea and supplementary detail, cause and effect or fact and opinion?
7. Can students classify issues and compare them?
8. Do students know how to make deductions from information and then apply them to other case studies?
9. Can students define an issue, argue a case and present evidence?

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Traditionally, academic literacy is viewed just a set of skills that students must master in order to perform successfully as a scholar [5]. A broad survey of four Queensland university websites indicated that the dominant model of academic literacy refers to a skills-based approach. Academic literacy strongly associates with academic skills advisers, learning support, or some form of centralised learning centre. Here, academic literacy is defined as a generic set of skills, e.g. grammar and editing and types of writing, such as essay writing, scientific reports and reference lists that students need for success. Procedural guides lead students step by step in the construction of particular text-types [6].

Academic literacy development in University of Waikato, New Zealand is offered to students from pre-degree bridging courses, to undergraduate, postgraduate, and higher degree, catering academic literacy needs of both domestic and international students. Although the intended outcomes for all students are the same to achieve the development of sufficient academic competence for successful study, the starting points for different types of students and their learning outcomes vary. For example, international students have difficulties in semantic norms. Although their writing is "correct" from a grammatical perspective, their sentences often include oddly constructed word or phrasal combinations. Other problems such as inaccurate word or verb forms, limited understanding of modality, inadequate or mechanical signposting (leading to problems of coherence and cohesion in text), or simplistic lexical choices and collocations are common. On the other hand, domestic students' grammatical errors are likely to include informal and inaccurate sentence structures, such as incomplete sentences, inadequate understanding of punctuation rules, poor spelling, or illogical signposting (caused by an underdeveloped sense of the logical relationships between sections of texts, rather than from not understanding grammatical structure) [7].

To be prepared for college and university courses, students need greater exposure and instruction in academic literacy than they receive in English classes alone. This need calls for greater coordination of literacy education among subject matter areas within high schools. Statement of academic literacy definitely consists of three competencies: reading, writing, and critical thinking. However, all the elements of academic literacy—reading, writing, listening, speaking, critical thinking, use of technology, and habits of mind that foster academic success— are expected of entering freshmen across all college disciplines. These competencies should be learned in the content areas in high school. It is, therefore, an institutional obligation to teach them [7].

The recent studies on English academic literacy of EAP students in Indonesia assert that university students of non-English departments are lack of academic vocabulary, reading, and writing. The academic literacy for freshmen is not set out as the requisite for academic competency [8]. EAP program facilitated to improving academic literacy tends to implement product oriented program giving students tests on TOEFL or IELTS in response on the request of students needs [9]. There is a program labelled as EAP in universities being observed but the contents of teaching materials are general English that put emphases on grammar, reading, and exercises to answers General English tests. Two factors are responsible in this context: teaching management rules MKDU (General Basic Skill Course) to serve for non-English program and instructional designs, including syllabus, curriculum, and textbooks are not available in reference to the needs analysis. MKDU is intended to design as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) or EAP, however, the implementation is lack of preparation and low standard [10].

3. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach to collect and analyze data. Three procedures of inquiry this study included content analysis, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), and SEMI-structured interviews. Document analysis was used to identify curriculum, teaching materials and English textbooks where academic literacy were included as the learning outcomes. FGD was conducted to share objectives and targets to include academic literacy prior to framework of academic literacy appropriate to the EAP program was implemented. In addition, an unstructured interview was set out to determine how academic materials were perceived by students, lecturers, and management of EAP program. This study involved 40 informants as volunteers including 30 undergraduate students, 15 each from IAIN Surakarta and Veteran University of Sukoharjo (Univet). Other volunteers were 5 lecturers and 5 management staffs of EAP program. Data obtained from the semi-structured interviews were analysed thematically. The themes were derived from the key research questions. Literature assisted in identifying the final categories. Data of this study were analyzed considering thematic construction and linkage of the themes in the holistic context of academic framework. Finally, design of EAP teaching materials that integrates academic literacy was formulated.

4. FINDINGS

Findings of this study are presented into three categories, including findings of the survey, needs analysis, and recommended framework of academic literacy.

The Survey

Document analysis on the academic literacy showed that EAP program in IAIN and Univet serves general English. EAP in both universities are likely to apply general English as the main objectives of teaching. Students are equipped with grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing assignments for general purposes. Speaking is used partly for medium of instruction. Classroom activities are dominated with exercises on grammar, vocabulary, and reading questions. Writing are based on writing techniques of paragraph and essay. No listening comprehension is given and practices on speaking interactions do not exist, either. What is set in the vocabulary building is the general word list ranging from 1,000 to 2,000 words as present in the passages of the textbook.

There are 5 students who were taught by a senior lecturer, who applied different model and objective, emphasizing reading competency as learning outcomes. Classroom interaction uses English and students should participate in English. The lecturer served English grammar integrated in reading, writing, vocabulary, and speaking. Reading comprehension was focused on genre-based approach, equipping students with different themes and vocabulary dependent upon the topic of the passages. This way, vocabulary the students should accomplish was achieved through reading texts of different genres. Vocabulary ranges were designed based on the word frequency in the passages that indicated general word list of 2,000 to 3,000 words.

Management staffs of the program argued that model of EAP teaching in this way is more applicable in reference to the actual conditions in the institutions. They thought that EAP program is not the core program to improve students' needs in the university. The management staffs say:

"EAP program is not out main concern. It is the Language Center management that they should serve. Our facilities are restricted and our teaching staffs are short. We do the job as how it works."

Concerning the main objectives of the EAP program and the quality of the teaching process, one staff asserts:

"The main objective of this program is to teach students English skills. Yet we do not have standardized objectives of teaching that determines competency as the main goal. We copy some book we think relevant and adapt the books for our needs. We have a team but the team does not think so much on quality of the book contents."

Needs Analysis

Needs analysis is the starting point to any curriculum development renewal process, syllabus and materials. To meet data of the needs analysis, data were collected from variety of source, including: students, lecturers, academic staffs, administrators, and current lecturers in the EAP program [11]. In general, results of needs analysis shows that EAP Program is conducted in trivialities. English academic literacy the students have indicates low level of mastery. Recruitments of students for EAP program is not based on the level of competency. General findings on the accomplishment of English skills based on students and instructors beliefs are as follows:

Speaking

Instructors mention that students demonstrate low competency in speaking. Instructors admit that in any presentation that require oral English during the class, only certain students participate in English. Interactions will cease where students do not know the vocabulary to express ideas in English. In addition, students admit that speaking is not required in the EAP class since the main objectives to join the EAP class is to gain certificate.

Reading

The majority of instructors claim that reading skills are the most important in the EAP class. They focus more on how to understand various texts through vocabulary exercises and answering questions that follow each passage. Reading comprehension is addressed to tap vocabulary building, grammar, and writing instead of reading techniques to literal and inferential comprehension. What the students face as the big problem is students have limited vocabulary where most messages in the texts are not clearly understood.

Writing

Writing skill is considered the most important area of academic skill, however, teaching writing for EAP program is very hard. Most instructors admit that to write a paragraph or an essay in English, instructors should teach grammar, vocabulary, and writing techniques. With low competency in vocabulary and grammar, students feel more difficult to impress creativity in writing forms. This way, logic and rhetoric of L1 that is Bahasa Indonesia are frequently used in the discourse.

Vocabulary

Problems on vocabulary building appear some ways that students do not have standardized vocabulary competency, e.g. 1,000 or 2,000 General Word List. If shared with academic vocabulary that ranges higher level that 3,000 words, students get frustrated. Subject-specific vocabulary is considered interesting but it is difficult to implement unless the context is relevant.

Grammar

Basic grammar is another problem the students face during the EAP class. Mistakes in using agreements, tenses, passive voice, plurality and auxiliary do are prevalent, indicating that basic knowledge of English is limited. This evidence obviously restricts students to develop greater knowledge in reading or writing for EAP where English academic literacy is the basic competency.

Recommended EAP Program

Results of needs analysis promote a recommendation from which English academic literacy would be integrated in the EAP program.

1. Learning outcomes should be stated explicitly in the curriculum and learning objectives be described in the teaching materials. The aim of the program should be literacy academic-based EAP program.

2. Learning outcomes of the program should consider and match objectives from students needs, institution, lecturers, and standard objective of international EAP program [12]. The mixture of four parties-objective, students-lecturers-university- international EAP would provide accurate contents and quality of the program.

3. Basic knowledge of English vocabulary and basic grammar be set as the minimum standard of competency. Core materials of vocabulary should be General Word List 1,000 to 3,000 words and academic vocabulary. In addition, basic grammar for academic uses would be the minimum target of grammar teaching.

4. The objectives of teaching English skills should consider typical skills each of which aspire recent researches that identify best practices in the EFL countries all over the world. The aim of speaking skills is to accommodate critical thinking that focuses on improving competency for interaction in various discourses and uses. As much as possible, medium of interactions during lectures should be in English. Reading comprehension is aimed at improving critical reading that starts from literal, inferential and critical skills. In addition, writing competency should focus on academic writing that puts emphasis on the development of ideas using variative techniques. Paragraph elements and essay organization that fit to the academic writing would be the main materials and rhetoric of the academic writing becomes the core materials of exposure for language styles in the writing.

5. Teaching materials are designed in competency-based materials dividing sub-competency of academic vocabulary, reading competency, writing competency, and speaking competency.

6. Syllabus and textbook be devised in accordance with the learning outcomes and should be framed for the Competency-Based EAP Syllabus and EAP Competency-Based Textbook.

5. DISCUSSION

This study defines academic literacy as basic knowledge of English and English skills. This way, academic competency would consist of academic vocabulary, academic grammar, reading, writing, and speaking skills. In line with definition from ICAS, academic competency includes: reading, writing and critical thinking. Reading competency indicates critical reading students should accomplish to suit reading in academic environment. Writing competency refers to academic needs such as report, paper, article journal, thesis and dissertation. In addition, critical thinking competency basically indicates competency in oral use of English either for academic setting or other various formal and informal settings.

The identification of English as academic literacy in this study is emphasized on the application of basic knowledge and skills in the competency basis. Competency-based instruction should be explicitly stated in the syllabus and textbook as admitted by Solikhah [8]. This implies that EAP program should develop competency-based EAP syllabus and competency-based EAP textbook. Prior to the development, of course, assigned university should conduct a survey on the curriculum and teaching materials and devise needs analysis as conducted in Korea by Kim [12] and Turkey by Yurekli [11].

Contents of basic knowledge in English refer basically to General Word List that ranges from 1,000 to 3,000 words, academic vocabulary, basic grammar and academic grammar [9]. If so far, reading and writing have been the core materials in EAP program; in this study reading and writing are not enough. A crucial competency is required for oral communication the students should accomplish from speaking activities. This way, critical thinking should start from speaking activities to other implementation in academic setting that require speaking as the basic competency. In conclusion, academic literacy framework for EAP program of Indonesian learners in this study would cope with general word list, academic vocabulary, basic grammar, academic grammar, speaking, reading, and writing.

6. CONCLUSION

This study admits that English academic literacy for EAP program in Indonesia is beyond the standard. Academic literacy is not involved either in the learning objectives to represent target of teaching materials, learning objectives to see learners' competency after completing program, textbooks, and English skills. A proposed academic literacy framework in this study is relied upon evidences that EAP program should incur general word list, academic vocabulary, basic and academic grammar, reading, writing, and critical thinking with emphasis on speaking competency.

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